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homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

FRIDAY, January 23, 1942

SUBJECT: "WHEN YOU BLACK OUT". Information from home economists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Today I have some timely notes on war housekeeping--some suggestions that I hope you'll never have to take. For my suggestions are on blackouts--ways and means to accomplish blackouts without putting out much money.

Perhaps our particular locality may never have to protect itself against air raids. But there's no harm in being prepared--at least to the point of knowing how to blackout the house if you have to. For when it comes to defense against air raids, an ounce of prevention is still worth a pound of cure.

This blackout information I'm passing on to you came to me from Bess Viemont Morrison, a textile specialist of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. She points out that blackouts needn't be a great item of expense.

Mrs. Morrison believes that with a little ingenuity you can often get a very effective blackout for practically nothing. She suggests that you save money and help out the general war effort by making use of materials you already have on hand.

Look through attics, cellars, high closet shelves for usable materials that are lying idle now. It's not only expensive to rush out and buy yards and yards of goods for blackout curtains, but the looms and machinery that it takes to produce that yardage are needed more vitally to meet military requirements.

The first step then, according to Mrs. Morrison, is to look the situation over. You won't want to blackout the whole house. Instead, select one room or two that are the safest. Then concentrate on these rooms and make them absolutely "light proof." Remember--you have to cover glass doors and glass door panels as well as windows--and skylights, transoms, and ventilating shafts.

To make a room light proof, there's no one best method. It depends mostly on the type of windows you have. But here are some possibilities.

Probably the first thing you think of when you consider blackouts is a blackout curtain, and this is probably the most common method of keeping light from sneaking through. But you may not have to have special blackout curtains.

Take a good look at the draperies you have now. See if you could possibly turn them into blackout curtains. The draperies you are using--or portieres and draperies you may have in the attic may be suitable after you alter them a little.

Make sure these draperies cover the whole window--and lap over well at the center. Then rip out the pinch pleats at the top and baste in a dark lining on the back. If the draperies are of damask--or velvet--or brocade--or some other heavy material with a lining--you'll need only a lightweight dark lining for the blackout. This can be of almost any thin material you have on hand--even good parts of old bed sheets dyed black. If the curtains aren't lined--your blackout lining will need to be of a heavier dark material--such as flannelette or canton flannel.

After you sew the lining in the curtains -- finish off the top with rings to go over the rod you have now. And make some arrangement so that the curtains can fit snugly at the side, as well as stay together at the middle.

Next--if you cannot use your regular curtains--you may want to make special blackout curtains. So take stock of the material you have rounded up. Anything will work that shuts out the light. It should be dark material--either black, dark blue, dark green, very dark brown, or the darkest red. If it isn't one of these colors or if it isn't an exceptionally heavy material--dye it.

The Office of Production Management suggests that old bedspreads--old blankets--old quilts--old carpets--old rugs--old sheets are some materials that may make suitable blackouts--and which you may have on hand.

Since you're not putting the blackout curtains up for decorative purposes, there's no harm in having them made up of many pieces seamed together. The bottom

hem needs to be just wide enough to keep the material from fraying--and the top hem just wide enough to slip over the rod if you hang them that way.

All effective blackout curtains--whether they're new or made over--must come four to six inches above the glass--and hang at least six inches below the sill. Allow one and one half times the width of the window for fullness. A double curtain will be easier to manage on a wide window. But it needs to lap over and fasten securely in the center. And there needs to be a generous overlap on both sides so no light can sneak through.

But now--turning from blackout curtains--here are some other blackout possibilities that you may be able to manage more economically.

If you have a basement recreation room--you may want to fix that up as a permanent blackout headquarters. Small basement windows may be painted black. Then if you want to, you can hang regular colorful curtains up to hide the somber black of the windows.

Another possibility--and a very effective one if you can do it--is to make a lightweight frame to fit into each window. A man who is handy with tools can make such a frame from scraps of wood on hand. Then you can cover this frame with oilcloth--or heavy dark paper--or two or three layers of old sheeting dyed black. Slip these into the windows at night and fasten them in place with turn buttons.

Or, maybe your shutters will be blackout enough--when you close them--then pull your shades and have your regular curtains at the window. But if the shutters still show light--you'll need to cover them on one side with some waterproof material--such as oilcloth or old canvas painted with a waterproof paint.

And now--here's my final blackout suggestion. Black or green shades may be enough to complete a blackout--if they are long enough and wide enough--and if they haven't any cracks or holes in them. They must hang far enough over the face of the window casing--and be long enough to pull to the sill without tearing. If your shades are light--you may want to tack dark shade cloth over your present rollers--with the dark cloth next to the window. Or you may want to paint your old shade with a flat black paint.

Those are all the blackout suggestions I have for today.

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